

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JUNE 22, 2005

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER *J*

SUBJECT: STATUS REPORT ON THE PLANNING ACTIVITIES RELATED TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ALEXANDRIA CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER

ISSUE: Establishment of an Alexandria Child Advocacy Center.

RECOMMENDATION: Receive the status report on the planning activities related to the establishment of an Alexandria Child Advocacy Center.

BACKGROUND: Over the last year there have been preliminary discussions in the community about the possible creation of an Alexandria Child Advocacy Center. As described in this status report, there have been many groups involved in these discussions and substantial interest in the collaborative creation of such a center in the City.

In 2002, then City Manager Phil Sunderland created the Child Welfare Partnership to assist the Department of Human Services' Child Welfare division in establishing a series of best practice protocols to prevent child abuse/neglect in the City of Alexandria. These protocols involved both internal and external initiatives such as the use of a risk assessment decision-making tool for social workers, establishment of collaboration meetings around the placement of children in foster care, inter-jurisdictional risk review meetings with Arlington and Fairfax and the development of the Our Kids-Our Business community awareness campaign. One other best practice that was identified was the concept of a child advocacy center.

Nationally child advocacy centers are child-focused, community-based programs that provide a site-based safe place for children and families who are victims of child abuse and neglect. At a minimum child advocacy centers are facilities primarily focused on forensic and prosecutorial elements of child abuse cases. In Alexandria, the City investigates approximately 70 abuse/neglect cases per month. Currently, Alexandria's children must travel to Fairfax INOVA Hospital or Childhelp in Fairfax to receive examinations for severe injuries or sexual abuse. They are interviewed at the Human Services Building, or at Alexandria Police offices. The current thinking for an Alexandria facility would be to expand the forensic model and provide interviews

and appropriate space for investigations, as well as to treat the family holistically by providing therapeutic visitation, parental counseling and engagement components and on-site coaching during family interaction. A program component and potential partners chart is attached. This broad concept would expand the proposed child advocacy center facility's role from forensic and prosecutorial elements to treatment and prevention of child abuse/neglect.

To that end, a subcommittee of the Child Welfare Partnership began meeting in January 2003. This subcommittee is comprised of representatives of the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office, Department of Human Services, Stop Child Abuse Now (SCAN), Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse, Office on Women, Alexandria Police Department, Victim Witness Assistance and the National Center for the Prosecution of Child Abuse. This subcommittee has worked to establish protocols around joint investigations and joint case rounds on child welfare cases.

To fully explore the feasibility of developing a child advocacy center in the City of Alexandria, the original subcommittee has been expanded to include representatives from the Alexandria Community Trust, the Alexandria Capital Development Foundation, INOVA, Childhelp, Northern Virginia Family Services and additional City staff as needed. In December of 2004, the child advocacy center development concept was brought to the attention of Lisa Collis, First Lady of the Commonwealth of Virginia. She is a strong advocate for the creation of child advocacy centers around the State and was immediately interested in assisting in the development of a center in the City of Alexandria. In her role as a board member for the Alexandria Community Trust, she will be able to assist this effort.

The possibility of the establishment of an Alexandria Child Advocacy Center arose around the time that both the Alexandria Community Trust and the Alexandria Capital Development Foundation were getting established. Both of these groups are interested in this project and have indicated an interest in raising substantial funds for this project. We anticipate determining the feasibility and finances related to creating an Alexandria Child Advocacy Center in the community as early as next fall and will bring this issue back to Council at that time.

FISCAL IMPACT: The capital costs and operating costs of this facility are some of the items to be identified during the upcoming planning efforts and are likely to range widely depending upon the definition of the mission of the center as well as the scope of the services which would be offered within the center.

ATTACHMENT: Child Advocacy Center: Program Components and Potential Partners

STAFF:

Debra Collins, Director, Human Services

Suzanne Chis, Director, Division of Social Services, DHS

Child Advocacy Center: Program Components and Potential Partners

Investigation- Forsenic, interviews, medical exam, civil and criminal proceedings	Treatment- Therapeutic family visits, health & behavioral assessments, family & play therapy	Prevention / Education- Parent Engagement training, site for internships, at-risk behavior prevention
City: (Police, DHS, City / Commonwealth's Attys., Office on Women)	City: (DHS, Health & MH/MR/SA)	City: DHS, ACPS, MH/MR/SA, Office on Women
Partner Providers: INOVA, Center for Multi- Cultural Human Services (CMHS), Childhelp USA, NVFS	Partner Providers: Childhelp USA, CMHS, NVFS	Partner Providers: NVFS, CMHS, Tenant Worker Support Committee, SCAN
	Evaluation: GU, GMU, VCU	